

Psychosocial Profiling Of Children In Conflict With Law: An Exploratory Study In India

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Abstract:

Juveniles in conflict with law are a significant part of society requiring special attention. They are a vulnerable population driven by a wide range of sociodemographic and psychosocial factors. Understanding these elements is critical to establishing effective interventions and policies. The purpose of this study is to explore the sociodemographic and psychosocial characteristics associated with juveniles in conflict with the law. The goal was to find trends in the key characteristics such as age, education, type of offenses, family dynamics etc. The study used an exploratory research design, with 21 juveniles identified through purposive sampling in Ahmedabad, Gujarat - India. Data was collected using structured interviews that comprised both open-ended and closed-ended questions. A descriptive statistical analysis was carried out to describe the data. The results revealed a complex profile of various sociodemographic & psychosocial parameters, reflecting substantial trends in all of them. These findings illustrate the multidimensional factors that influence juveniles in conflict with law and is compared with respect to global context. Understanding these factors and the role they play will allow stakeholders to build more effective prevention and mitigation methods for these adolescents.

Keywords: *Juvenile in conflict with law, Psychosocial factors, Delinquent behavior, Profiling*

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Introduction

Juvenile delinquency remains a pressing concern in modern society, particularly in developing nations like India, where rapid urbanization and socioeconomic changes have led to new challenges for youth. The complex interplay of sociodemographic and psychosocial factors that contribute to children coming into conflict with the law necessitates a thorough examination to inform effective interventions and policies. As Justice Sanjiv Khanna of the Supreme Court of India and Executive Chairman of NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) quoted: "Criminals are made by circumstances. No one is a born criminal. The path towards criminality is often a result and consequence of experiences and circumstances mostly shaped by neglect, external influences or lack of guidance"

This profound statement underscores the critical importance of understanding the environmental, familial, and individual factors that shape a child's trajectory towards delinquent behavior. It emphasizes that juvenile delinquency is not an inherent trait, but rather a consequence of various external influences and life experiences. The scale of juvenile delinquency in India is significant and warrants urgent attention. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report of 2021, a total of 29,768 cases involving juveniles in conflict with law were registered, showing a 4.7% increase from the previous year (NCRB). Of these cases, 67.8% involved juveniles in the 16-18 years age group, highlighting the particular vulnerability of older adolescents. Moreover, the report indicated that 72.2% of juveniles in conflict with law belonged to families with an annual income of less than ₹1,00,000, emphasizing the role of economic factors in juvenile delinquency (NCRB).

The developmental pathway to juvenile delinquency is multifaceted, with risk factors emerging as early as the prenatal period and evolving through infancy, toddlerhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. These risk factors span various domains, including individual characteristics, family dynamics, school experiences, peer influences, and community environments. Recent studies have highlighted the significance of early childhood experiences in shaping future behavior, with factors such as maternal substance abuse during pregnancy, parental criminality, and exposure to domestic violence significantly increasing the likelihood of juvenile delinquency (Gubbels *et al.*, 2019).

In the Indian context, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, provides a legal framework for addressing issues related to children in conflict with the law (Ministry of Law and Justice). This Act was amended in 2021 to strengthen the provisions for serious offenses committed by children, reflecting the evolving nature of juvenile crime in India (Ministry of Law and Justice). However, the implementation of this legislation and the development of effective intervention strategies require a nuanced understanding of the psychosocial profiles of these juveniles. Previous research in India has indicated that factors such as poverty, lack of education, family dysfunction, and substance abuse play significant roles in juvenile delinquency (Gupta *et al.*, 2022). A study by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) found that 40% of juveniles in conflict with law were illiterate or had dropped out of school before completing primary education (ICSSR). Furthermore, the study revealed that 28% of these juveniles came from families where at least one parent was absent due to death, divorce, or separation, highlighting the impact of family structure on delinquent behavior.

The state of Gujarat, where this study is focused, reported 1,851 cases of juvenile delinquency in 2021, accounting for 6.2% of the national total (<https://ruralindiaonline.or>) Ahmedabad, as one of the largest cities in Gujarat, faces unique challenges related to urbanization, migration, and socioeconomic disparities that may influence juvenile delinquency rates. However, there is a paucity of region-specific studies that provide a comprehensive psychosocial profile of juveniles in conflict with the law in this area. This exploratory study aims to investigate the sociodemographic and psychosocial characteristics of juveniles in conflict with the law in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. By focusing on key variables such as age, education, types of offenses, and family dynamics, we seek to identify patterns and trends that can inform targeted interventions and policy development. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing more effective prevention strategies and rehabilitation programs for this vulnerable population (Pushpender and Sabharwal, 2013) The theoretical framework for this study draws upon developmental psychopathology (Cicchetti and Rogosch, 2002) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner). These perspectives emphasize the importance of considering multiple levels of influence on a child's development and behavior, from individual characteristics to broader societal factors. By adopting this holistic approach, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to juvenile delinquency in the local context.

The findings of this study have the potential to contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge on juvenile delinquency in India. By providing a comprehensive psychosocial profile of children in conflict with the law, we aim to equip stakeholders, including policymakers, law enforcement agencies, mental health professionals, and social workers, with valuable insights to address this critical social issue more effectively. Moreover, this research aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

In conclusion, this study seeks to bridge the gap in our understanding of the psychosocial factors influencing juvenile delinquency in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. By doing so, we hope to contribute to the development of more targeted and effective interventions that can break the cycle of delinquency and promote positive outcomes for these vulnerable young individuals. The insights gained from this research may have broader implications for juvenile justice policies and practices across India, potentially informing evidence-based strategies to reduce juvenile crime rates and improve rehabilitation outcomes.

Methodology

Aim : To explore and analyze the sociodemographic and psychosocial characteristics associated with juveniles in conflict with law in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India.

Objectives :

1. To identify and describe key sociodemographic characteristics of juveniles in conflict with law.
2. To examine the psychosocial factors influencing delinquent behavior among these juveniles.

Research question :

What are the predominant sociodemographic characteristics of juveniles in conflict with law in Ahmedabad, Gujarat?

Which psychosocial factors are most strongly associated with delinquent behavior among these juveniles?

Research design : Exploratory research design

Study Sample: Juveniles in conflict with law from Observation home, Khanpur - Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India with sample size - 21; Sampling - Purposive sampling.

Inclusion Criteria:	Exclusion Criteria:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals under 18 years of age • In conflict with law (i.e., have allegedly committed an offense) • Willing to participate in the study • Children in conflict with law from observation home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals 18 years or older • Not in conflict with law • Unwilling or unable to participate in the study

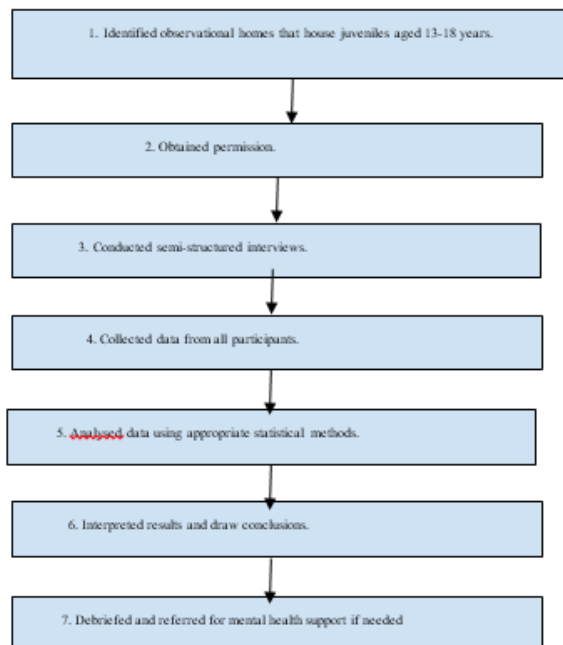
Tools : Semi- structured interviews comprising both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Involved detailed questionnaire about socio-demographic details to elicit detailed responses from participants. The interview was conducted by a trained researcher and each interview took approximately 35 - 40 minutes to complete.

Statistical Analysis: Descriptive statistical analysis to describe the data and identify trends in sociodemographic and psychosocial characteristics

Procedure:

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant authorities with due ethical considerations, the following procedure was followed:

Figure No. 1: Steps



Results & Discussion

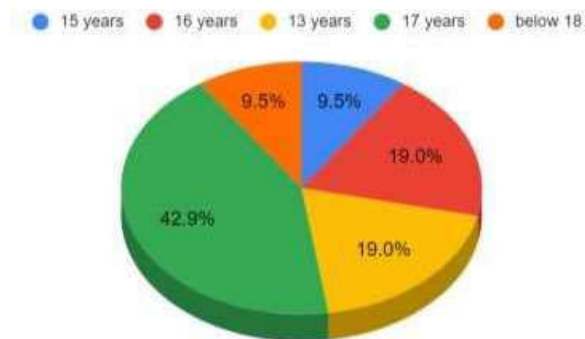


Figure No. 2 : Depicting Distribution of age among children in conflict with law

The results indicate that juvenile delinquents are predominantly clustered within specific age groups. Specifically, 45.7% fall into the 17-year-old category, followed by 19.1% at 16 years, 15.5% at 13 years, and 10.7% at 18 years. These proportions highlight the significance of late adolescence in the context of being in conflict with law.

Research studies conducted such as in a case study conducted in Hyderabad, Lucknow and Pune on Juveniles in conflict with law highlight the prevalence of 16-18 year olds which supports the age distribution seen in the present study (Gupta et al., 2015). It also aligns with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)’s comprehensive statistics which reveals that in 2018, 75.3% of juveniles were from 16-18 age group.

Firstly, adolescents aged 17 years constitute a significant proportion (45.7%) of the juvenile offender population. At this age, they are often in the later stages of adolescence, experiencing increased autonomy and seeking independence from parental control. Peer influence becomes more pronounced, leading to risk-taking behavior. Their cognitive abilities are still developing, which contributes to impulsive decisions, which could be one of the reasons for the highest prevalence of 17 year old adolescents (Menon and McCarter, 2021).

On the other hand, 15-year-olds (15.5%) occupy an intermediate position. They are still influenced by peer dynamics and family contexts, seeking validation from both peers and family members. However, their behavior tends to be less extreme compared to older age groups (Truong et al., 2024).

Whereas, 16-year-olds (19.1%) are navigating a critical developmental phase. Peer pressure and

novelty-seeking tendencies drive their involvement in various activities. The desire for acceptance among peers may lead them toward delinquent acts (Mitchell et al., 2015) On the other end of the spectrum, the prevalence of 13-year-olds (15.5%) suggests early adolescence. While they may engage in minor delinquency, their actions tend to be less severe due to limited exposure and cognitive immaturity (Alderman et al., 2019) As juveniles approach the age of legal adulthood, the dynamics shift. 18-year-olds (10.7%) stand on the verge of transitioning into full legal responsibility. They become more aware of the consequences of their actions as well as the intensity of the punishment they may face as adults, which may deter them from engaging in actions that might lead to conflict with the law.

As told by Adolescent - P, (“18 ke baad kuchh karunga to andar daal denge wo bhi bahut samay ke liye. Saja bhi jyada hoti hai kalam lag jayenge. Abhi karunga to koi kuchh nahi kar sakta, pata hai mujhe chhoot jaunga”). (“If I do anything after 18, they’ll put me in jail for a long time. The punishment is also harsher and it will take a long time. If I do it now, they can’t do much, I know I’ll get away with it”).

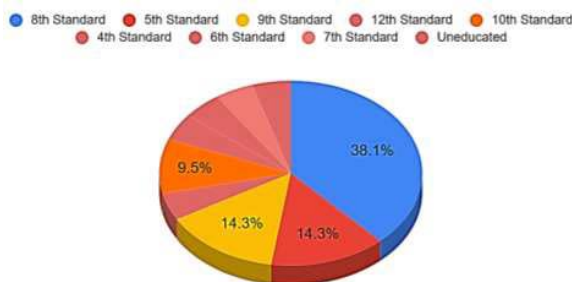


Figure No. 3: Depicting Distribution of Education among children in conflict with law

According to the results obtained, 38.1% adolescents completed their 8th standard and did not continue it later. 14.3% were educated till 5th standard, 14.3% at 9th standard, 9.5% at 10th standard, while 4.8% consisted of 4th, 6th, 7th, 12th standard and uneducated.

Interpreting the above results, it could be because of various reasons such as -i) Socioeconomic Factors : Wherein juveniles who come into conflict with the law come from economically weaker backgrounds. Poverty can limit access to quality education, leading to dropouts at various stages. Also, insufficient resources such as textbooks, school supplies, and proper infrastructure can hinder educational progress (Duncan and Magnuson, 2012). Juveniles facing legal issues may struggle to attend school consistently

due to financial constraints. As well as, dysfunctional family environments, parental substance abuse, or neglect can disrupt a child's education. Juveniles may prioritize survival over schooling, which includes earning & providing for the family. Pursuing higher education becomes a luxury when immediate financial needs take precedence (McLoyd, 1998).

ii) School-Related Factors. Wherein schools may not provide adequate support for struggling students. Lack of individualized attention, remedial classes, or counselling services can contribute to dropout rates (Rumberger, 2013). Juveniles in conflict with the law may face bullying or peer pressure, affecting their emotional well-being and academic performance. Some may choose to leave school to avoid such negative experiences. Harsh disciplinary measures within schools can alienate students. Juveniles who have already encountered legal issues may find it difficult to cope with strict rules and punishments (Espelage and Swearer, 2003). Similarly, many children come from families where parents or elder siblings have limited education. The importance of education may not be adequately emphasized, leading to disinterest or lack of motivation. Adding to which cultural beliefs and social norms influence educational choices. In some communities, education is undervalued, and alternative paths (such as vocational training) which may provide financial support to the family are considered more practical. Lack of educated role models within the family or community can impact a child's aspirations. If they don't see successful educational trajectories, they may not prioritize schooling. As said by Adolescent R, "Padhai se kya hoga? Usse achha kuchh kama le. paisa leke aaye. mere gharpe sab kaam karte hai. bina padhai ke bhi to kaam milta hai." ("What's the point of studying? It's better to earn something. Bring home money. Everyone in my house works. You can get a job even without an education.")

Thus, the majority of the sample have studied till 8th standard which could be because of several factors. At this stage, education is often compulsory or highly encouraged by authorities, leading to increased enrolment and completion rates. Also, completing 8th standard may be perceived as a milestone. Which could be due to various reasons such as government initiatives or scholarships targeting education can also work as incentives of the completion. On the contrary, minority of the sample have studies till 12th standard, 4th standard, 6th & 7th standard and were uneducated which could be because of various reasons such as socioeconomic barriers, lack of resources etc. making it difficult for them to complete their desired educational level. Additionally, school related factors such as negative experiences, inadequate facilities,

resources and support can further impact the dropout rates.

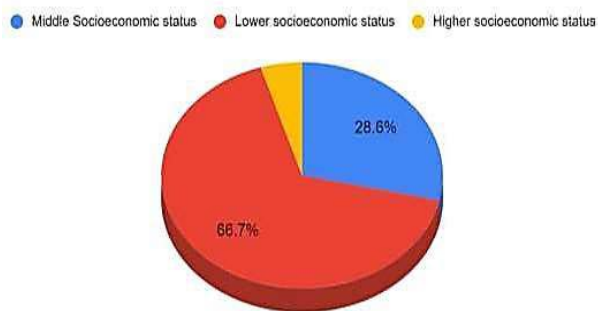


Figure No. 4: Depicting Distribution of Socioeconomic status among children in conflict with law

According to the results obtained, 66.7% belonged to lower socioeconomic strata, 28.6% belonged to middle socioeconomic strata and 4.8% belonged to higher socioeconomic strata.

More than the half of the sample belonged to the lower socioeconomic strata which aligns with the existing literature wherein the studies have repeatedly shown a link between socioeconomic factors and being in conflict with the law. National crime records bureau (NCRB) data reveals that a significant proportion of children in conflict with law belong to lower socioeconomic strata. Similarly, other prominent research studies highlight the impact of poverty, family background and peer influence.

The aforementioned findings could be due to economic disadvantage which is an important factor mainly in a developing country like India. Adolescents from economically weaker sections are more likely to engage in impulsive behaviour. Wherein, poverty can lead to experiencing frustration, hopelessness and limited access to resources which pushes them towards criminal acts as a way of survival or fulfilling their needs. Furthermore, lack of employment aspects can increase the feelings of frustration and contribute to behavior in conflict with law. On the contrary, lower representation of adolescents from higher socioeconomic strata reflects a contrasting trend. Affluent backgrounds often provide greater access to resources, educational opportunities, and support systems, which can mitigate the risk of delinquent behavior. Wherein, families with higher socioeconomic status may offer stable environments, including access to quality education, extracurricular activities, and positive role models, thereby reducing the likelihood of juvenile delinquency. Additionally,

the availability of legitimate avenues for economic advancement and social mobility within affluent communities may deter youth from engaging in criminal activities (Rekker *et al.*, 2015).

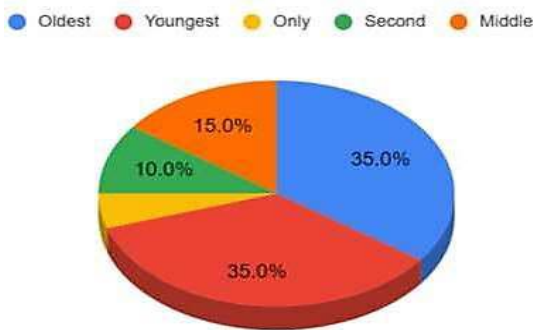


Figure No. 5: Depicting Distribution of Birth order among children in conflict with law

According to the results obtained, 35.0% were the youngest, 35.0% were oldest, 15.0% were middle child, 10.0% were second child and 5.0% were only child.

According to the results obtained, prevalence of both youngest and oldest children among juveniles in conflict with the law is seen. This aligns with established theories regarding the distinct characteristics associated with these birth orders. Firstborns, comprising 35.0% of the sample, often bear the weight of parental expectations and may feel pressured to set an example for their younger siblings. This pressure to excel may lead to stress or rebellion, potentially contributing to delinquent behavior. Similarly, the representation of youngest children, also at 35.0%, reflects Alfred Adler's theory of birth order, wherein he proposed that individuals possess an innate drive for social connection and belonging, which he termed social interest. Youngest children, often receiving less attention and responsibility within the family structure, may compensate for this perceived imbalance by seeking attention and recognition from peers and society at large. This drive for social validation may manifest in behaviours that are attention-seeking or rebellious, potentially leading to involvement in delinquent activities. He also introduced the concept of the "inferiority complex," suggesting that individuals may develop feelings of inadequacy or inferiority compared to their older siblings. Youngest children, perceiving themselves as less capable or influential within the family hierarchy, may strive to assert their autonomy and competence through unconventional or risk-taking behaviours. This desire to overcome feelings of inferiority may

contribute to their higher representation among juveniles in conflict with the law (Blakemore, 2024).

Adler also emphasized the impact of birth order on personality development, suggesting that each position within the family carries its own set of challenges and opportunities. Youngest children, often characterized by traits such as creativity, charm and adaptability may leverage these qualities to navigate their position within the family dynamic. However, the perceived disadvantages of being the youngest, such as less parental oversight and pressure to live up to older siblings' achievements, may influence their behavior and decision-making processes (Des Marais, 2022). Studies also resonate indicating a significant association between birth order and delinquency, with higher birth order linked to increased likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior. Whereas in contrast, only children are the least represented among juveniles in conflict with the law, comprising only 5.0% of the sample. This can be attributed to their unique position within the family dynamic. Only children, akin to firstborns, are characterized by independence and self-reliance, which may serve as protective factors against delinquent behavior. Additionally, the absence of sibling dynamics and competition fosters a more stable family environment, reducing the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours. However, it's essential to acknowledge that individual circumstances and parenting styles may also influence the behavior of only child. Their relative independence and self-reliance may mitigate the risk of delinquency but could also contribute to risk-taking behavior, albeit to a lesser extent compared to other birth orders.

The distribution of middle children and second children, constituting 15.0% and 10.0% of the sample, respectively, falls between the highest and lowest categories. Middleborn children, characterized by adaptability and sociability, may navigate family dynamics differently, seeking attention or feeling overlooked, which could impact their behavior. Similarly, second-born children, while not experiencing the same level of pressure as firstborns, may still contend with challenges related to parental expectations and sibling dynamics. Their position in the family hierarchy may shape their behavior, albeit to a lesser extent than firstborns or youngest children. Overall, the distribution of birth order among juveniles underscores the complex interplay between family dynamics and delinquent behavior, highlighting the importance of considering individual and familial factors in understanding and addressing juvenile delinquency.

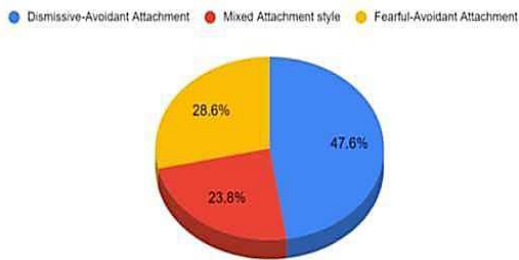


Figure No. 6: Depicting Distribution of Attachment styles among children in conflict with law with their parents

According to the results obtained, 47.6% belonged to Dismissive-avoidant attachment style, 28.6% were of fearful-avoidant attachment style and 23.8% were of mixed attachment style.

Attachment theory, as posited by Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver, provides a framework for understanding how early relationships with caregivers shape an individual's emotional development and behavior throughout life. In the context of juvenile delinquency, attachment styles significantly influence behavior and relationships. Highest percentage is found to be Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment Style (47.6%) wherein individuals with dismissive-avoidant attachment tend to downplay the importance of close relationships and avoid emotional intimacy. They exhibit self-reliance and often maintain emotional distance from others. As said by adolescent S, ("mai khud hi auto mai khata hu, sota hu. agar lage to ghar jata hu. gharwale kabhi bulate hai par mujhe achha nahi lagta. kya hi karu ghar jake usse achha bahar lagta hai") In the context of juvenile delinquency, adolescents with this attachment style often have negligent parents who do not provide emotional support or consistent discipline. This lack of boundaries and minimal consequences for misbehaviour leads to a diminished sense of responsibility and self-regulation. The emotional distancing and self-reliance can result in strained relationships and a lack of guidance, pushing these adolescents towards delinquent behaviours as a way of coping with or rebelling against their emotional isolation. Hazan and Shaver's work suggests that dismissive-avoidant individuals develop these traits as a Défense mechanism against rejection or neglect in early caregiver relationships. This aligns with the findings where the majority of juveniles exhibit this attachment style, indicating a high prevalence of neglectful parenting environments (**Hazan and Shaver, 1987**) Wherein lowest representation has been Mixed attachment style (23.8%) wherein individuals with a mixed attachment style exhibit traits of both secure and insecure attachment, influenced by

varying parenting approaches. These individuals may show comfort with emotional intimacy in some contexts while struggling with trust and avoidance in others. Adolescents with this attachment style often experience a mix of parenting styles. One parent might be authoritative, providing structure and support, while the other might be permissive, leading to inconsistency in expectations and discipline. In many cases, fathers exhibit permissive parenting, while mothers adopt a more dominant and structured approach. As told by adolescent Q, ("Mummy achha rakhti hai. papa to dekhte hi nahi kuchh. kuchh ho to mummy ke pas bolta hu. papa se baat nahi hoti") The mix of parenting styles results in experiencing different dynamics, which can create confusion and inconsistency in the adolescent's behavior and emotional responses. This can act as both a protective and risk factor, depending on the dominant influence and the child's ability to navigate these dynamics. Hazan and Shaver's theory suggests that mixed attachment styles reflect the complexity of human relationships and the varying influences of different caregivers. This aligns with the findings where a significant minority of juveniles exhibit mixed attachment styles, indicating the nuanced impact of diverse parenting approaches. On the other hand, Fearful-Avoidant attachment style is (28.6%) wherein those with a fearful-avoidant attachment style experience a conflict between the desire for closeness and a fear of rejection. They may want emotional connections but are also wary of getting hurt. Adolescents with this attachment style often have authoritarian parents who enforce strict rules without prioritizing emotional connection. Communication is typically one-sided, leaving the child feeling unheard and undervalued. This leads to trust issues and difficulties in forming healthy relationships. The fear and resentment towards parents can manifest as rebellion and engagement in risky behaviours. Hazan and Shaver's theory posits that fearful-avoidant individuals struggle with intimacy due to inconsistent and harsh caregiving. This aligns with the results showing a significant, but not predominant, presence of this attachment style among juveniles, reflecting the impact of authoritarian parenting. The results, interpreted through Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver's attachment theory, reveal the significant influence of early caregiver relationships on juvenile behavior.

Adding to which, a similar research conducted by Nicholson examining 102 young offenders, this study investigates attachments to mothers, fathers, and peers as potential mediators between early adversity and later criminal behavior. The results suggested that a positive relationship with an adult caregiver may be protective for young people who have experienced prior adversity.

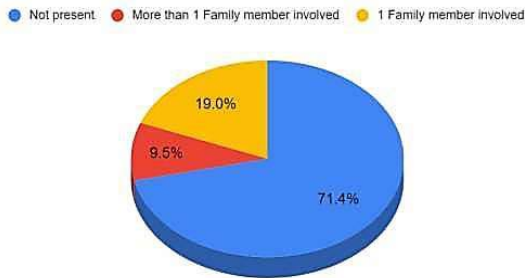


Figure No. 7: Depicting Distribution of History of Criminal Behavior in Family among Children in conflict with law

According to the results obtained, 71.4% had no history of criminal behavior in the family, 19.0% had 1 family member involved.

Study conducted by Bhoomanagoudar et al explored the relationship between juvenile delinquency and family dynamics. The findings revealed that family structure and conflict significantly influence criminal behavior among juveniles. Specifically, the presence of a broken family, poverty, and a history of criminality in the family were associated with an increased likelihood of delinquent behavior among juveniles.

While the findings indicate that 71.4% of family members have no history of criminal behavior, it's crucial to recognize that this majority does not necessarily negate the influence of family dynamics on juvenile delinquency. As family dynamics are multifaceted, criminal behavior can result from a combination of factors. Even if most family members have no criminal history, other aspects (such as family structure, communication patterns, socioeconomic status, and parenting styles) may still play a role. Research studies often identify risk factors associated with delinquency. These risk factors may include poverty, broken families, substance abuse, and exposure to violence. Even if the majority of family members are not involved in criminal behavior, the presence of these risk factors can still impact a juvenile's likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts. Each juvenile's experience is unique. Some may be resilient despite adverse family circumstances, while others may be more vulnerable. It's essential to consider individual differences and protective factors that may mitigate or exacerbate the impact of family history. On the contrary, 9.5% had more than 1 family member involved in criminal behavior. According to Social Learning Theory, juveniles learn behaviours by observing and imitating family members; if they see relatives engaging in criminal activities, they may view these actions as acceptable or rewarding

(Hoffman and Akers, 2017). Family Systems Theory adds that crime can become normalized within the family, reducing its stigma, and criminal behavior can be passed down through generations as children adopt the behaviours of parents and siblings (Albukordi et al., 2012) Despite being the lowest percentage, the presence of multiple family members involved in crime remains a critical factor, emphasizing the need for interventions that address familial and environmental influences to effectively break the cycle of delinquency.

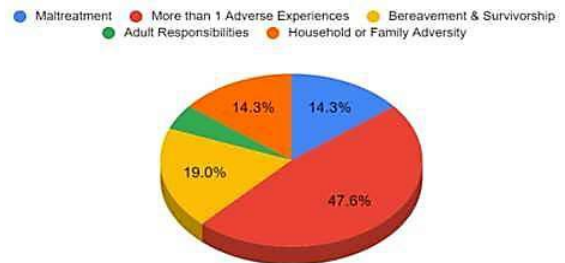


Figure No. 8: Depicting Distribution of Adverse experiences among Children in conflict with law

According to the results obtained, 47.6% had experienced more than 1 adverse experiences, 19% experienced bereavement and survivorship wherein majority of them had lost one or both of their parents to death. 14.3% experienced maltreatment which included physical abuse, neglect, and household and family adversity. 4.8% reported adult responsibilities which included being young carers for the whole family and being a child labour.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are events during childhood that are stressful and may impact upon mental and physical health having effects in childhood and future adulthood (Touloumakos and Barrable, 2020).

Wherein Adjustment includes :

- Migration - For a child or adolescent, moving to a new country or city can be incredibly challenging. They may face language barriers, cultural differences, and feelings of isolation. The loss of familiar surroundings and friends can lead to anxiety and depression.
- Ending Relationships - Whether it's the separation of parents, loss of a close friend, or the death of a family member, relationship endings can cause grief, sadness, and emotional distress

Prejudice involves :

- LGBTQIA+ Prejudice - Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity can lead to feelings of shame, self-doubt, and social exclusion. LGBTQIA+ youth may experience bullying, rejection, and internalized stigma.
- Whereas in Sexism and Racism - Experiencing prejudice due to gender or race can impact a child's self-esteem, mental health, and sense of belonging. It may lead to feelings of inferiority, anger, or frustration.

Household or Family Adversity includes :

- Substance Misuse - Growing up in a household with substance misuse (e.g., alcohol or drugs) can disrupt family dynamics, create an unstable environment, and increase the risk of neglect or abuse.
- In Intergenerational Trauma - Children exposed to trauma within their family (such as war, violence, or loss) may carry the emotional burden. This can affect their behavior, relationships, and coping mechanisms.
- Destitution or Deprivation includes - Poverty, lack of basic necessities, and financial instability impact a child's physical health, educational opportunities, and overall development.

Inhuman Treatment constitutes of :

- Torture - Children subjected to torture experience severe physical and psychological trauma. This can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and nightmares.
- Forced Imprisonment or Institutionalization - Being confined against their will can cause feelings of powerlessness, fear, and loss of autonomy.
- Genital Mutilation - This traumatic practice can lead to physical pain, emotional distress, and long-term health consequences.
- Adult Responsibilities can also be one of the adverse experiences for children which involves :
- Young Carers - Children responsible for caregiving (e.g., caring for a sick parent or sibling) miss out on typical childhood

experiences. They may feel overwhelmed, stressed, and isolated.

- Child Labor - Involvement in child labour deprives children of education, playtime, and healthy development. It can lead to physical strain, exploitation, and limited opportunities.

Bereavement and Survivorship also has possibility of impacting adversely ;

- Traumatic Deaths - Losing a loved one suddenly (due to accidents, violence, or suicide) can result in complicated grief, depression, and feelings of abandonment. Surviving an Illness or Natural Accident - Children who survive life-threatening illnesses or accidents may experience anxiety, fear of recurrence, and changes in their worldview.

The highest representation of juveniles experiencing more than one adverse experience (47.6%) reflects the cumulative effect of multiple stressors in their lives. These juveniles likely face a combination of challenges, such as migration, relationship endings, prejudice, household adversity, destitution, inhuman treatment, and adult responsibilities. This accumulation of stressors can exacerbate the risk of mental health issues and maladaptive behaviours. Additionally, experiencing multiple ACEs increases the likelihood of adverse outcomes in adulthood, including substance abuse, mental health disorders, and involvement in criminal behavior (**Graf et al., 2020**).

On the contrary; the lower representation of juveniles experiencing maltreatment (14.3%) and adult responsibilities (4.8%) may be attributed to various factors. Maltreatment, including physical abuse, neglect, and household adversity, often goes unreported or unrecognized, leading to underestimation in survey data. Similarly, adult responsibilities, such as being young carers or involved in child labour, may be

underreported due to social stigma or normalization of such experiences within certain communities. Additionally, these ACEs may be less prevalent in certain socioeconomic or cultural contexts where there are stronger support systems or protective factors in place (**Mallett et al., 2012**).

It's essential to recognize that no trauma is inherently more severe or less than another; each adverse experience can profoundly impact a juvenile's well-being and development. Whether it's the cumulative

effect of multiple stressors or the profound impact of a single traumatic event.

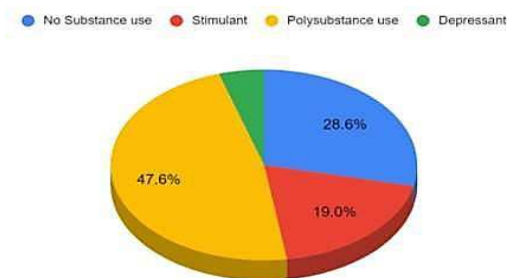


Figure No. 9: Depicting Distribution of Substance use among Children in conflict with law

Polysubstance Use was (47.6%) which comprises nearly half of the sample. On the other hand no Substance Use was (28.6%). Whereas Stimulant Use was (19%) and Similarly, Depressant Use was (4.8%).

Polysubstance use refers to the concurrent use of multiple substances, such as alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and other illicit drugs. These individuals are at higher risk due to the cumulative effects of different substances. The reasons for polysubstance use can vary, including peer influence, coping with stress, or seeking pleasure. No substance group abstained from using any substances. Factors contributing to their abstinence may include strong family support, personal values, or fear of legal consequences. It's essential to explore protective factors that prevent substance initiation in this subgroup. Stimulants like amphetamines, cocaine, or prescription medications fall into this category. Juveniles using stimulants may seek increased energy, focus, or euphoria. which included substances like alcohol, sedatives, and opioids. These individuals may use depressants to self-medicate anxiety, insomnia, or emotional distress. However, misuse can lead to addiction, impaired judgment, and risky behaviours.

According to the results obtained, prevalence of polysubstance use among adolescents, which is notably higher at 47.6%, compared to the significantly lower rate of depressant use, which stands at 4.8%. There could be multiple reasons for adolescents engaging in polysubstance use. They often have varied motivations, including peer pressure, stress coping, and pleasure seeking. This multifaceted approach to substance use indicates that individuals may not rely on a single substance to fulfil their needs but rather experiment with multiple substances to address different aspects of their lives. As mentioned by adolescent T, "Pehle mai maal hi fuunkta tha. uske baad usse maja nahi ane laga to ek karke try kar liya"

Additionally, certain substances like alcohol and tobacco are more accessible to adolescents due to factors such as lax enforcement of age restrictions or cultural norms that tolerate their use. When adolescents are already using one substance and others are readily available, they may be more inclined to engage in polysubstance use. As mentioned by adolescent S, "Vimal to school se khata hu. sab khate hai. Desi bhi mil jati hai baju mai". Also, adolescents are highly influenced by their social circles, and if polysubstance use is normalized within their peer group or community, they may be more likely to engage in such behavior themselves. Peer pressure and the desire to fit in can significantly impact substance use patterns among adolescents (Green, 2023).

In contrast, the lower prevalence of depressant use among adolescents can be attributed to several factors: Depressants, such as sedatives or tranquilizers, may offer effects that are less appealing to adolescents compared to stimulants or the broader spectrum of effects sought through polysubstance use. Adolescents may be more drawn to substances that provide increased energy or euphoria rather than those that induce relaxation or sedation. Adolescents may employ different coping strategies to manage anxiety or emotional distress, and depressants may not be their preferred method of coping. Also, adolescents may have less interest in the specific effects of depressants compared to other substances. The sedating or calming effects of depressants may not align with their desired experiences or expectations, leading them to opt for substances with different effects.

Overall, the higher prevalence of polysubstance use among adolescents can be attributed to a combination of factors such as accessibility, social influences, coping mechanisms, and unawareness of risks, whereas the lower rates of depressant use may stem from the specificity of depressant effects and alternative coping strategies employed by adolescents.

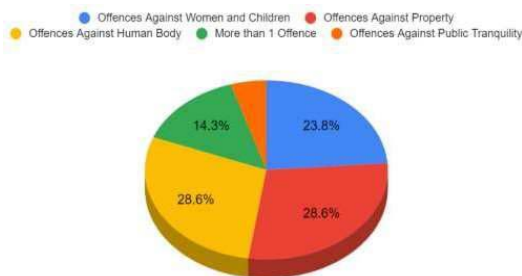


Figure No. 10: Depicting Distribution of Type of Offences in Family among Children in conflict with law

According to the results obtained, 28.6% offences against property and Offences against human body, 23.8% offences against women and children, 14.3% more than 1 offence, 4.8% Offence against public tranquillity.

Offences Against the Human Body includes whoever causes any harm or injury to the human body comes under this category. Chapter 16 of the Indian Penal Code contains the offences against the human body, which are considered heinous crimes. They are discussed in sections 299 to 377 of IPC. These include murder, attempt to murder, culpable homicide, dowry death, kidnapping and abduction, etc. Offences committed against any property, whether movable or immovable, comes under chapter 17 of the Indian Penal Code, which contains the offences against property. They are described from sections 378 to 462 of IPC. These offences include dacoity, preparation for dacoity, robbery, preparation for robbery, extortion, theft, mischief, housebreaking, etc. Offences Relating to Public Tranquillity constitutes of whoever disturbs the peace of society, commits the offence relating to public tranquillity. (Tranquillity means free from disturbance; calm.) Offences against public peace are mentioned in chapter 8 of the Indian Penal Code from sections 141 to 160. These include unlawful assembly, rioting, affray, etc.

Offences Against Women and Children includes various offences against women and children. They are covered in different chapters and scattered throughout the IPC.

Against women, these offences include grievous hurt by acid attack (section 326A, 326B), attacking modesty of women (section 354), rape (section 376), voyeurism (section 354C), stalking (section 354D), etc. Against children, it includes acts done with causing the death of a quick unborn child (section 316), abandoning a child (section 317), kidnapping (sections 359 to 361), maiming (section 363A), etc. (Delhi Police Academy, 2023). Highest was Property & Human Body (28.6% each) which could be because broad categories as both "offences against the human body" and "offences against property" encompass a wide range of crimes, from severe acts like murder to relatively less severe ones like theft. Thus, this broad spectrum of criminal activities increases the likelihood of these categories collectively representing a significant portion of overall offences.

Within these broad categories, certain crimes may occur more frequently than others. For instance, theft, a crime against property, might be more common compared to more serious crimes like murder or abduction. This variance in the frequency of specific

crimes within each category could contribute to their combined high prevalence. The study sample used to determine the prevalence of offences may be biased towards a population that is more prone to crimes against the human body and property. Factors such as location, socioeconomic status, and age demographics of the sample population can influence the types of crimes observed and reported. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of opportunity, and prevailing social norms can significantly impact crime rates. As said by adolescent T, "Ek chori se to paisa mil jata hai. kidhar kaam karo to achha paisa kidhar milta hai?" Areas with high levels of poverty or unemployment may experience higher incidences of property crimes like theft, while factors like societal conflicts or cultural tensions may contribute to crimes against the human body, such as assault or murder. As said by Adolescent B, "Usne maa-behen ki gaali di isliye maine mara. pehle se hi wo mere family ke sath bol karta hai." Whereas Lowest is Public Tranquillity(4.8%), which include acts like rioting or unlawful assembly, constitute a relatively specific category of crimes compared to the broader categories of offences against the human body and property. As such, these offences may occur less frequently in the studied population due to their specific nature.

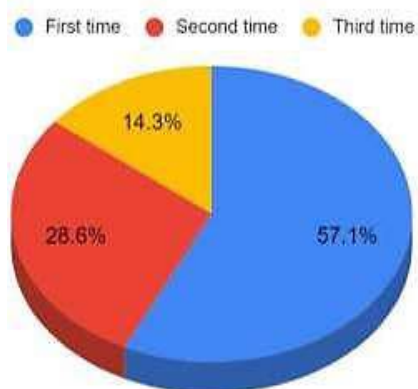


Figure No. 11: Depicting Distribution of Count of offences among Children in conflict with law

The data provided indicates the frequency of offences committed by a group of individuals. The majority, 57.1%, are first-time offenders. This means that more than half of the individuals in this group committed the offense for the first time. The next significant group is the second-time offenders, which constitutes 28.6% of the group. This means that just under a third of the individuals committed the offense for the second time. The smallest group is the third-time offenders, making up 14.3% of the total. This indicates that a smaller fraction of the group committed the offense for the third time.

This distribution suggests that as the number of offenses increases, the percentage of individuals who commit these offenses decreases. It's a positive sign as it indicates that the majority of individuals do not repeat their offenses beyond the first time. However, the presence of second and third-time offenders also highlights the need for effective measures to prevent recidivism. Supporting this observation, studies on recidivism rates have shown that a significant number of offenders do not reoffend after their first offense. However, there are still individuals who continue to commit offenses, leading to the percentages observed for second and third-time offenders. These findings underscore the importance of interventions aimed at reducing recidivism and supporting first-time offenders in particular to prevent them from reoffending.

Highest is first-Time Offenders which is (57.1%). It could be because that first offenses may often stem from impulsive or reckless behavior, particularly common among younger individuals (**Nieuwbeerta et al., 2010**). As individuals mature and gain life experience, they may become more aware of the consequences of their actions, leading to a decreased likelihood of reoffending. Experiencing the consequences of their first offense, such as legal repercussions, social stigma, or personal guilt, can serve as a deterrent for individuals. The fear of facing similar consequences in the future may discourage them from engaging in further criminal behavior. Personal circumstances can significantly influence an individual's likelihood of reoffending. Positive life changes, such as obtaining stable employment, forming supportive relationships, or accessing mental health services, may reduce the need or temptation to commit further crimes (**Smith and Gartin, 1989**).

Whereas lowest Third-Time Offenders are (14.3%) which could be due to persistent patterns of criminal behavior despite previous interventions. As said by adolescent P, "Ab to darr fail gaya hai mera. sab darne lage hain." Several factors may contribute to this: such as unresolved mental health issues, substance abuse problems, or lack of social support can contribute to repeat offenses. Without addressing these underlying issues, individuals may struggle to break free from the cycle of criminal behavior. Involvement in criminal networks or associations can make it challenging for individuals to leave a life of crime. Peer pressure, coercion, or a sense of loyalty to criminal associates may lead individuals to continue engaging in illegal activities. Interventions aimed at first-time offenders may not effectively address the root causes of criminal behavior or provide adequate support for rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Without access to comprehensive rehabilitation programs, individuals

may lack the necessary skills and resources to successfully transition away from criminality.

Strengths

The study examines a wide range of factors including sociodemographic characteristics, family dynamics, attachment styles, substance use, and types of offenses. This holistic approach provides a multifaceted understanding of juvenile delinquency. By using both quantitative data (e.g., percentages) and qualitative insights (e.g., quotes from participants), the study provides a richer understanding of the issues. The conclusion section compares findings to international research, placing the local context within a broader global perspective.

Limitations

With only 21 participants, the study's generalizability is limited. This small sample may not be representative of the broader juvenile offender population in Ahmedabad or India. Without a comparison group of non-offending juveniles, it's difficult to determine which factors are uniquely associated with delinquent behavior. While the study focuses on risk factors, there's less emphasis on protective factors that might prevent juvenile delinquency.

Conclusion

This exploratory study of juveniles in conflict with the law in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India reveals several key trends that both align with and diverge from global patterns in juvenile delinquency. By examining various sociodemographic and psychosocial factors, we gain valuable insights into the complex nature of juvenile offending in this specific context.

Age Distribution: The study found a predominance of older adolescents (16-18 years) among juveniles in conflict with the law, with 45.7% being 17 years old. This aligns with global trends, as noted in studies from various countries that consistently show higher rates of delinquency among older adolescents. For instance, a meta-analysis by Jolliffe across multiple countries confirmed that delinquency peaks in late adolescence. The developmental challenges and increased autonomy during this period appear to be universal risk factors for juvenile offending (**Jolliffe et al., 2027**).

Education: The educational profile of the sample, with 38.1% having completed only 8th standard, reflects a global concern regarding the link between limited education and juvenile delinquency. A study by Aizer

and Doyle in the United States found that incarceration during high school significantly reduces the probability of high school completion. However, the specific dropout patterns may be more pronounced in the Indian context due to socioeconomic factors and cultural attitudes towards education (**Aizer and Doyle, 2015**).

Socioeconomic Status: The high representation (66.7%) of juveniles from lower socioeconomic strata mirrors global findings on the relationship between poverty and juvenile delinquency. A comprehensive review by Ellis and McDonald across multiple countries consistently found socioeconomic disadvantage to be a strong predictor of youth offending. This underscores the universal challenge of addressing economic disparities as a preventive measure against youth crime (**Ellis and McDonald, 2001**).

Birth Order: The equal representation of youngest and oldest children (35% each) among offenders presents an interesting pattern that may be more specific to the Indian family context. While global studies have explored birth order effects on delinquency wherein later borns were found to be more involved in risk taking behaviours, such as Sulloway and Zweigenhaft's work on birth order and risk-taking behavior, the pronounced representation of both extremes in this sample warrants further investigation in similar cultural settings (**Sulloway and Zweigenhaft, 2010**).

Attachment Styles: The prevalence of dismissive-avoidant (47.6%) and fearful-avoidant (28.6%) attachment styles among the juveniles aligns with international research linking insecure attachment to delinquent behavior. A meta-analysis by Hovee across multiple countries confirmed the relationship between insecure attachment and delinquency. However, the specific distribution of attachment styles may reflect cultural nuances in Indian parenting practices and family dynamics. Globally, insecure attachment styles are consistently associated with higher rates of delinquency. However, the specific distribution of attachment styles can vary. In individualistic cultures, anxious attachment is often more prevalent, while in collectivistic cultures like India, avoidant attachment styles may be more common. For example, a study by Schmitt found that collectivistic cultures tended to have higher levels of avoidant attachment compared to individualistic cultures. This difference may be due to the emphasis on group harmony and emotional restraint in collectivistic societies, potentially leading

to more dismissive-avoidant and fearful-avoidant attachment styles (**Hovee et al., 2012**).

Family Criminal History: Surprisingly, 71.4% of the sample had no family history of criminal behavior in the current study, which contrasts with some global studies emphasizing intergenerational transmission of criminal behavior. For instance, Besemer found significant intergenerational transmission of offending across three generations in the Netherlands and England. This finding suggests that other environmental and individual factors may play a more significant role in this context. The discrepancy in family criminal history findings between developed countries like the Netherlands and England and developing countries like India may be attributed to differences in social support systems, urbanization rates, and the extent of documented criminal records. Additionally, factors such as stronger extended family networks in developing countries, differences in policing and judicial practices, and variations in the definition (**Besemer et al., 2017**).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): The high prevalence of multiple adverse experiences (47.6%) among the juveniles is consistent with global research on ACEs and juvenile delinquency. A large-scale study by Fox in the United States demonstrated a strong relationship between ACEs and juvenile offending. However, the specific types and combinations of adversities may reflect unique cultural and social challenges faced by Indian youth such as extreme poverty, child labor, early marriage, caste-based discrimination, or limited access to education and healthcare, which may not be as prevalent in the contexts typically studied in global ACE research.

Substance Use: The predominance of polysubstance use (47.6%) among the sample aligns with global trends in adolescent substance use patterns. A study by Conway across 26 European countries found high rates of polysubstance use among adolescents. However, the specific substances used and the cultural context of substance use may differ from Western studies. Wherein, global studies often focus on alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis as common substances of abuse among adolescents, the cultural context in India may involve different patterns, such as higher use of inhalants or locally available substances like betel nut, as well as different social norms surrounding substance use in family or religious settings (Bhang during certain festivals).

Type of Offenses: The equal representation of offenses against property and against the human body (28.6% each) reflects a pattern seen in many global juvenile crime statistics. A comparative study by Enzmann across 30 countries found similar patterns in juvenile offending. However, the relatively high percentage of offenses against women and children (23.8%) may indicate specific cultural or social issues that require targeted intervention in the Indian context. In the global context, juvenile offenses often include a higher prevalence of property crimes and less severe violent offenses, with factors like gang activities and access to firearms influencing offense patterns in some countries (e.g., the United States); however, the relatively high percentage of offenses against women and children in the Indian sample may reflect specific sociocultural issues such as gender inequality, patriarchal norms, and challenges in child protection systems that require targeted interventions (Enzmann *et al.*, 2010)

Recidivism: The distribution of first-time (57.1%), second-time (28.6%), and third-time (14.3%) offenders suggests a recidivism pattern that is generally consistent with global trends. A meta-analysis by Cottle across multiple countries identified key predictors of juvenile recidivism. However, the specific factors influencing repeat offending may be unique to the local context for example, cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, and the structure of the juvenile justice system in India may interact differently with risk factors such as include a history of antisocial behavior, substance abuse, family dysfunction, peer influences, low academic achievement, mental health issues, and socioeconomic disadvantage, as identified in numerous studies across different countries and cultures. compared to Western countries, potentially affecting recidivism rates and patterns (Cottle *et al.*, 2001).

In conclusion, while many findings from this study align with global patterns in juvenile delinquency, there are also distinct features that reflect the unique social, cultural, and economic landscape of Ahmedabad and India more broadly. These insights underscore the importance of developing culturally sensitive and context-specific interventions to address juvenile delinquency effectively. Future research should delve deeper into these unique aspects to develop targeted prevention and rehabilitation strategies for juveniles in conflict with the law in India. This study's findings have significant implications for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies within the community context of Ahmedabad and potentially broader regions of India. The complex interplay of sociodemographic and psychosocial factors identified here calls for a

multidisciplinary approach to addressing juvenile delinquency. We propose that community-based programs should focus on early intervention, particularly targeting the 16-18 age group where delinquency peaks. These programs could involve collaborative efforts between schools, mental health professionals, and social services to address issues such as substance use, insecure attachment styles, and adverse childhood experiences. For instance, school-based prevention programs could incorporate elements of attachment theory and trauma-informed care, while community mental health services could offer targeted support for at-risk youth and their families. Furthermore, our findings suggest the need for enhanced vocational training and educational support programs, particularly for youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Future research should evaluate the effectiveness of such interventions and explore innovative models of service delivery that can be tailored to the unique cultural and social context of urban India. By translating these research findings into actionable, community-based solutions, we can work towards reducing juvenile delinquency rates and promoting positive youth development.



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